

(New Wine in New Wineskins) 14. God's Blessing or God's Approval?

by Zac Poonen

To seek God's approval, we must cease living for ourselves and seek God's kingdom first, putting His interests in the centre of our life.

Scripture: Revelation 7:9

Topics: "True Spirituality", "God's Approval vs. God's Blessing"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the distinction between seeking God's blessings and seeking His approval, highlighting that many believers are content with material blessings while neglecting a deeper, God-centered life. He contrasts two groups in Revelation: a vast multitude blessed by God and a smaller group who have God's approval for their faithful lives. Poonen warns that material blessings do not equate to God's approval, as seen in biblical examples where God blessed disobedient ministries. True spirituality involves a shift from self-centeredness to a life focused on pleasing God and serving others. Ultimately, the goal is to have the testimony of pleasing God, as exemplified by Jesus and the faithful in Scripture.

Transcript

There are two types of believers - those who seek only God's blessing and those who seek God's approval; and there is a world of difference between the two. In Revelation 7:9-14, we read of a great multitude of believers - so vast that they cannot even be numbered. Their testimony is that they owe their salvation to their God (verse 10) and that their robes are washed white in the blood of Christ (verse 14); or in other words, that God has blessed them. This is good, no doubt. But it is a vastly different testimony from that of the group of believers mentioned in Revelation 14:1-5.

There we read of a small group that can be numbered. In fact they are only 144,000 - a small number, when you consider that they have been selected out of the billions of people who have lived on earth. Their testimony is that they followed Christ totally on earth, no guile was found in their mouth, and they kept themselves from being defiled by 'women' (that is, the women mentioned in Revelation 17 - Babylon and her daughters). Or in other words, they pleased God.

Notice the contrast. The first group received God's blessings. The second received God's approval. We get what we seek. If we are satisfied with God's blessing, then that is all we will get. And if we are satisfied with God's material blessings alone, then we will not even advance to getting His spiritual blessings.

Most believers are satisfied with being blessed by God - and that too mostly in the material realm alone. That is why Christian book stores are flooded with books on how one can be healed of one's sicknesses and become wealthy by tithing, etc. The emphasis is on physical and material well-being - health and prosperity. This is the clearest symptom of a self-centred life. And yet, we read in God's word, that Jesus died in order that we should no longer live for ourselves but only for Him (2 Corinthians 5:15); or in other words, not to please ourselves but only Him. Or to put it in yet another way, Jesus died in order to deliver us from a self-centred life, and to bring us into a God-centred life.

One of the things that can puzzle us these days is the way God blesses a lot of Christian work that is so thoroughly compromising in its character. Does this mean that God is not disturbed by the compromises and the deviations from His word? No, it certainly does not mean that. God blesses many ministries that He cannot totally approve of.

Even when Moses disobeyed God's word and struck the rock (when God had told him to speak to it), God still 'blessed' that disobedient ministry. In fact, two million people were blessed through it. Yet God dealt with His disobedient servant severely afterwards (Numbers 20:8-13). God blessed that ministry because He loved those two million needy people, and not because He approved of what His servant did. It is even so today.

Many ministries are blessed because God loves the needy people who need salvation, healing, etc. But He certainly does not approve of much that goes on in the name of Jesus today. He will certainly punish the compromising preachers in due time.

The only condition to be fulfilled in order to get God's material blessings is that one must be either good or evil! For Jesus said that God sends sunshine and rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45). Material blessing is therefore no sign of God's approval on one's life. Two million Israelites disobeyed God for forty years in the wilderness - so greatly that God was angry with them (Hebrews 3:17). Yet God gave them food and healing throughout all those years - and that too miraculously (Deuteronomy 8:2). Even miraculous answers to prayer in the physical realm are therefore no indication that God is happy with a person's life.

God's approval, on the other hand, rested on Jesus when He was thirty years old, only because of one reason: Jesus had faithfully overcome temptation during all those years. He had lived a life centred in His Father and not in Himself. He never did what pleased Himself (Romans 15:3). At His baptism, the Father testified, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" and not "This is My well-beloved Son whom I have blessed". The latter testimony would have meant nothing. It was the former, indicating God's approval, that meant everything for Jesus. To follow Jesus is to seek for the same testimony ourselves.

As children of Adam, we are all born self-centred. We grow up expecting everything to revolve around us and to serve us. When we get converted, we expect God also to serve us and bless us in various ways. We come to Him initially to be blessed with His forgiveness, and then go on to seek the blessing of healing, answer to prayer, material prosperity, employment, housing, marriage partner, etc. But it is possible for our lives to be self-centred still, even when we are deeply 'religious' in our own and other people's eyes. God becomes just one more person in our 'orbit', and we seek to get what we can out of Him. The prodigal son came back in order to get food from his father; but the father still received him. God receives us even when our motives are utterly selfish. He loves us so much that He longs to receive us even when we come to Him with an obviously self-centred motive. His hope however is that we will mature

quickly to realise that true spirituality is to partake of His own nature, which is to give rather than to receive. With the vast majority of His children, however, God is never able to realise that purpose. They live and die in their self-centredness thinking only of 'I', 'Me' and 'Mine' and of material and physical blessings.

To be mature is to have our mind renewed so that it is no longer centred on what we can get out of God, but rather on what God can get out of us in our one earthly life. This renewing of our mind is what brings transformation (Romans 12:2). This is what qualified the 144000 (in Revelation 14) to stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion.

True spirituality is not just getting victory over anger, irritability, dirty sexual thoughts, love of money, etc. It is to cease living for oneself. It is to cease seeking our own - our own gain, our own comfort, our own convenience, our own will, our own rights, our own honour and even our own 'spirituality'.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He taught them a prayer that does not contain the words 'I', 'Me' or 'Mine' in it even once (Luke 11:1-4). He taught us there to be concerned first about the Father's name, kingdom and will, and then to be concerned as much about our fellow believers (their material and spiritual welfare) as about ourselves ('us', 'us', 'us' and not 'me', 'me', 'me'). It is easy to learn that prayer 'by heart' and to repeat it like a parrot. But to learn that lesson in our heart requires that we truly forsake all and put God in the centre of our heart. The law that we will find most frequently in our members (Romans 7:22), if we are honest in judging ourselves, will be the law of selfishness, that seeks our own convenience and rights all through life.

Jesus taught us to seek the kingdom of God first - that is to dethrone 'Self' and to put God and His interests in the centre of our life. Jesus gave up the comfort of heaven in order to do His Father's will on earth. Paul gave up the comfort of being a Christian businessman living luxuriously in Tarsus, in order to be an apostle facing hardships for the Lord. Every one of the apostles lived that sacrificial God-centred life. They gave their all for the promotion of God's kingdom on earth, unlike many of today's 'tourist preachers'.

A holiness that still leaves us seeking our own comfort and convenience is a false holiness - even if we have overcome anger and dirty thoughts. This is what many have not realised; and hence Satan has been able to deceive them. Many Christians travel or migrate to different countries seeking conveniences and comfort and wealth. They can still have God's blessings upon their lives, but not God's approval - for no one can serve both God and mammon (that is, wealth, pleasure, comfort, etc.). If we think that God's blessing on our lives and on our children is an indication that He is also happy with us, then Satan has truly deceived us. God's blessing and God's approval are two totally different things. At the end of our earthly lives, the testimony that we have should be the testimony that Enoch had before he left the earth: "He pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5). Only three words - but no one can have a more powerful testimony to his earthly life. This is the testimony that Jesus and Paul had. To merely have a testimony that 'He was blessed by God' is worth nothing, for millions of unbelievers too can have that testimony.

God looks for those who will seek His approval, and not just His blessing.

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